

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING SPECIAL MEETING
June 24, 2003

Members Present: Isaac BenEzra, Jean Haggerty, Elsie Fetterman, Liz Massey, Sara Wolff, Henry Peirce, Janice Denton

Staff Present: John Clobridge, Nancy Pagano, Barbara Slovin

Others: Jean Laino, Charles Smyser, Richard Mundo (Agawam COA Director), Dolly Jolly, Sy Becker (Channel 22), Marge Babb, Sondra LaPollo (Chicopee Senior Center Director), Dick Gililooly (Salvo House), Frank Wells (Amherst Public Transportation Committee), Arthur Swift (PVTA Board, Amherst Public Transportation Committee), Nancy Maglione, Karen Jones, and others

Isaac convened the meeting by saying he wished there would be a Federal agenda item to help cities and towns. He said the COA wants to partner with PVTA to keep rates limited to \$1 increase for all seniors.

Richard Mundo (Agawam COA Director, Amherst resident, PVTA Board Rep) says \$450,000 is needed by PVTA to reduce fares from \$2 to \$1. Cutting back Sunday service would save \$650,000. PVTA could look at other parts of their budget to save money. For example, every PVTA employee gets a 50% benefit package and their contract will be renegotiated soon. PVTA should put the options for cutting the budget back on the drawing board. Senior fares are going up for some as high as 400%. If Arthur Swift had voted for \$1 fare per ride, then that's what we would have now (i.e. instead of \$2.)

Sondra LaPollo (Chicopee S.C. Director and PVTA Board Rep and Amherst resident) is very upset that the Amherst rep (Arthur Swift) took that \$2 stand. Smaller towns have less fixed routes but higher fees. Foregoing Sunday service would have been a good place for an adjustment because families and caregivers are available and doctors' offices are closed. The whole PVTA budget should be examined to look for more places to cut back. Giving up driving is the most devastating change for elders next to losing a loved one.

Jean Haggerty (Ann Whalen Tenants' Organization President, Amherst COA) July 1st is when the PVTA charges will begin and people will really have to factor this into their budget. Some people will have to choose getting a prescription or going to the grocery store. People are wondering if they could boycott van service. People may stop coming to lunch if they have to pay for transportation there and they might not eat properly on their own.

"We have to give people in the community time to adjust to this new fee. Seniors know they have to share the burden of the deficit." (Isaac)

"It's not possible for a lot people to put down the \$3 to pay for the discounted tickets." (Jean Laino, Clark House Tenant)

Isaac has requested that folks be able to voice their concerns at the Select Board Meeting next Monday night at 6 PM at Town Hall. This will be an agenda item.

Nancy Maglione Information has not been made available in a timely way. PVTA did not know either. The State did not pay PVTA's back bills. Money has had to be borrowed to do this. Nancy says the Town has budgeted enough to subsidize the fare down to half. She understands that some people need a total subsidy, some need ½. It has to be figured out. The details haven't been worked out. Handicapped and dial-a-ride are Amherst's highest priority. Amherst doesn't want to give up any of its service. Nancy apologized to all for the uncertainty at this point, but information wasn't available until recently and it's very confusing to sort out as well.

Isaac suggested a **motion to encourage our Selectboard to petition PVTA to have a moratorium on increases until more information is available.** Elsie made the motion and Liz Massey seconded it and IT WAS VOTED UNANIMOUSLY.

Frank Wells Listed other cities and towns where cheaper passes/tickets are available. He thinks the state budget should be examined because of irregularities in the MBTA. That state is discriminating against PVTA. He wants the COA to enter into a class action suit to look into this.

Isaac asked for a **motion to ask our Selectboard to meet with other municipalities to look into the disparity of how our sales tax is used and to join in any class action suit.** This was moved by Henry Peirce and seconded by Janice Denton. **VOTED.** Elsie Fetterman made the only dissenting vote which she said was because she wants Nancy Maglione and John Clobridge to have an opportunity to work things out.

Dick Gililooly (V.P. of Mass Senior Action, and Walter Salvo House resident—PVRTA is actually looking for class actions. PVRTA serves 58% disadvantaged riders compared to 32% served by MBTA. A discrimination case could be made.

Karen Jones—Every COA should sign on to this class action suit.

A Northampton elder (unknown name) is outraged about the idea of eliminating Sunday service as it works well for going to church and the malls. He questioned whether there are zones in the new system or not. Answer: Now there is only one zone and transfer.

Isaac asked for a **motion stating that the COA official recommends to the Selectboard that the fares be \$1 each way vs. \$2. THIS WAS MOVED AND VOTED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Nancy Pagano—Suggested that the COA make loan money available to elders who can't afford the \$30 up front cost of the discounted tickets. John said that this won't be necessary because the tickets are on commission.

Sara Wolf said that the COA should look into any and all actions related to transportation.

Liz Massey asked who has the most up-to-date information about the services and fees. Clarification is needed.

Isaac asked Dolly to bring to the Selectboard a request to vote for a moratorium on all fee increases until September.

Sondra Lopollo—What works in one community won't work for others. The community didn't have a chance to work things out and to meet with legislators to look at the broader picture.

Nancy Maglione—it's a "timeline problem". It's hard to gain consensus and it takes time...e.g. How do you get communities to agree on what to do about the Sunday service question.

Karen Jones—Advises just using the van as usual and tell the COA if there are problems.

Richard Mundo—PVRTA is paying its 200 drivers time and ½ for a two hour training to learn how to take the extra money. He feels this is a lot of money that could be better used for direct service.

Respectfully submitted, Nancy Hirsh Pagano